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 DE RUEHEG #3721/01 0331711
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 FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO
 TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5784
 INFO RUEHAL/AMCONSUL ALEXANDRIA 6061
 RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 4392
 RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 1911
 RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE 4104
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E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
 TAGS: PREL, IS, EG, US
 SUBJECT: TABA AND EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI DIALOGUE

REF: (A) TEL AVIV 1752, (B) CAIRO 2811

1. (SECRET - ENTIRE TEXT.)

2. IN A JANUARY 30 MEETING WITH ISRAELI AMBASSADOR SASSON, I FOUND HIM EXCEEDINGLY GLOOMY ABOUT THE STATE OF EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI RELATIONS. HE REGALED ME BITTERLY WITH AN ACCOUNT OF HOW HIS EMBASSY HAD ALLEGEDLY BEEN DIDDLED BY THE GOE WITH REGARD TO ISRAEL'S APPLICATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS YEAR'S CAIRO INTERNATIONAL BOOK FAIR, NOW IN PROGRESS HERE. (WE ARE PREPARING OUR OWN POST-MORTEM ON THIS SUBJECT AND WILL TRANSMIT IT TO THE DEPARTMENT AND INFO ADDRESSEES SHORTLY.) SASSON ALSO COMPLAINED ABOUT THE CONTINUED LACK OF EGYPTIAN FORTH-COMINGNESS IN THE TRADE AND TOURISM FIELDS. DESPITE GOE ASSURANCES GIVEN TO DAVID KIMCHE DURING HIS VISIT TO CAIRO IN NOVEMBER AND SUBSEQUENTLY REITERATED TO SASSON BY FORMIN ALI. HE POURED COLD WATER ON THE NOTION OF ANOTHER KIMCHE VISIT TO EGYPT (REFTELS), OBSERVING THAT THE GOE HAD NOT REACTED IN ANY WAY TO THE LETTER HE BROUGHT TO ALI FROM PRIMIN SHAMIR UPON HIS (SASSON'S) RETURN FROM ISRAEL IN THE SECOND WEEK OF JANUARY. THAT LETTER, ACCORDING TO SASSON, CONTAINED A CLEAR EXPRESSION OF ISRAEL'S DESIRE TO SEE THE DIALOGUE ESTABLISHED BY THE RECENT EXCHANGE OF VISITS BY KIMCHE AND SHAFEI ABDEL HAMID CONTINUE. (COMMENT: WE UNDERSTAND THAT THIS LETTER, REPORTEDLY DELIVERED BY SASSON TO ALI ON JANUARY 12, ALSO CONVEYED ISRAEL'S FORMAL REJECTION OF EGYPT'S EARLIER REQUEST THAT WEST BANK/GAZAN PERSONALITIES BE ALLOWED TO ATTEND THE UPCOMING PALESTINE NATIONAL COUNCIL MEETING AT ALGIERS (FBIS NC141852), AS WELL AS THE GOI'S DECISION TO "POSTPONE" CONSIDERATION OF THE NOTION OF FACILITATING BROADER CONTACTS BETWEEN EGYPT AND THE INHABITANTS OF THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES. END COMMENT.)

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3. MUCH TO MY SURPRISE, SASSON PROFESSED COMPLETE IGNORANCE OF PRESIDENT MUBARAK'S PUBLIC DENUNCIATION

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OF ANTI-SEMITIC COMMENTARY IN THE EGYPTIAN MEDIA -- ISSUED HERE ON DECEMBER 31, DURING SASSON'S ABSENCE, THROUGH THE INTERCESSION OF CODEL FRANK (SEE 83 CAIRO 38336). (COMMENT: SASSON'S OWN STAFF, IN OUR SUBSEQUENT CONTACTS WITH THEM, WERE DUMBFOUNDED TO HEAR THIS, SINCE MUBARAK'S STATEMENT RECEIVED PAGE-ONE TREATMENT IN THE CAIRO PRESS, WAS REPORTED TO JERUSALEM, AND WAS INCLUDED IN THE BRIEFING MATERIALS PREPARED FOR SASSON UPON HIS RETURN. THEY ATTRIBUTE THEIR AMBASSADOR'S LAPSE TO HIS PREOCCUPATION WITH FAMILY PROBLEMS, AS WELL AS TO GROWING FRUSTRATION OVER HIS INABILITY TO HAVE ANY POSITIVE IMPACT ON THE STATE OF EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI RELATIONS. END COMMENT.)

4. THE FOREGOING NOTWITHSTANDING, WE WILL CONTINUE TO PROBE HERE FOR SIGNS OF EGYPTIAN FLEXIBILITY -- IN THE AFTERMATH OF EGYPT'S REINSTATEMENT IN THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE ORGANIZATION -- WITH REGARD TO FUTURE GOE DEALINGS WITH ISRAEL. WE ARE GIVING PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO THE IDEA OF ENCOURAGING RENEWED DIALOGUE BETWEEN CAIRO AND JERUSALEM OVER THE TABA DISPUTE. WE HAVE OSCILLATED IN THE PAST BETWEEN (A) THE THEORY THAT PROGRESS ON TABA WOULD NOT BE POSSIBLE IN THE ABSENCE OF AN OVERALL IMPROVEMENT IN BILATERAL EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI RELATIONS, AND (B) THE OPPOSITE THEORY THAT SOME SLIGHT PROGRESS ON TABA MIGHT SERVE AS TO PROMOTE A THAW IN THOSE RELATIONS. AT THIS JUNCTURE, WE HAVE BEGUN AGAIN TO PROPOUND THE LATTER THEORY IN OUR CONTACTS WITH EGYPTIAN OFFICIALDOM. AT THE SAME TIME, WE REMAIN SADLY AWARE THAT BOTH SIDES HAVE SURROUNDED THE TABA ISSUE (AS WELL AS OTHER MATTERS OF BILATERAL CONTENTION) WITH AN ARRAY OF "LINKAGES" THAT HAVE FRUSTRATED OUR PAST EFFORTS TO MAKE HEADWAY ON THE RELATED QUESTIONS OF INTERIM ARRANGEMENTS AND PROCEDURES FOR CONCILIATION/ARBITRATION. WE WOULD LIKE TO THINK THAT WE, IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE DEPARTMENT AND EMBASSY TEL AVIV, MIGHT YET HIT UPON SOME FORMULA THAT WOULD ENABLE THE PARTIES TO SET THESE "LINKAGES" AND THEIR PAST RECRIMINATIONS ASIDE, AND TO START AFRESH IN AN EARNEST ENDEAVOR TO "MOVE THE TABA ISSUE OFF DEAD CENTER" (REF A). (THE IDEA OF AN INITIAL MEETING AT A NEUTRAL LOCATION -- WITHOUT PRECONDITIONS AS TO S E C R E T SECTION 02 OF 02 CAIRO 03721

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FUTURE VENUES, AND WITHOUT PREJUDICE TO AN AGENDA-FOCUS ON INTERIM ARRANGEMENTS OR CONCILIATION/ARBITRATION PROCEDURES -- STRIKES US AS A POSSIBLY PRODUCTIVE WAY TO BEGIN.) WHAT WE SHOULD BE SEEKING TO ACHIEVE, IN ANY EVENT, IS THE SORT OF TANGIBLE PROGRESS THAT WILL INDICATE TO THE EGYPTIANS THAT THE ISRAELIS ARE NOT UNALTERABLY BENT ON PRESERVING THE STATUS QUO IN TABA, AND TO THE ISRAELIS THAT THE EGYPTIANS ARE NOT INFLEXIBLY DETERMINED TO PERPETUATE THE "COLD PEACE" WITH ISRAEL JUST BECAUSE IT SUITS THEIR PURPOSE IN FOSTERING RECONCILIATION WITH THE ARAB WORLD. VELIOTES
END OF MESSAGE
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